

NUTRITION THE BASIC REQUIREMENT FOR HEALTHY CHILDREN**Dr. Eswari Ramesh***Assistant Professor in Economics, Queen Mary's College Chennai - 4***Introduction**

Healthy eating can stabilize children's energy, sharpen their minds, and even out their moods. Food is part of our daily lives. Good nutrition throughout life has a significant and positive impact on our health and well being. The present generation of India, yes, the children of India are addicted to junk food. They prefer eating junk food rather than eating hygienic and healthy food prepared by their mothers. They always eat unhygienic and unhealthy food like pizzas, burgers, pasta and noodles. They eat these things while sitting and watching television, playing video games. They watch ads and demand their parents those things. The children should know what are the harmful effects of eating these things. Children who eat well are healthier. In the school, healthier children tend to be better learners. Studies show that well-nourished children have: decreased lateness and absenteeism improved behavior less anxiety more effective coping skills increased alertness. Unhealthy eating habits play a part in the rising rates of childhood overweight and obesity, and Type 2 diabetes. Young children with poor eating habits tend to keep these habits as they age, increasing the risk of chronic diseases later in life such as cancer, stroke, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and heart disease.

Food culture

Food preferences can vary geographically, culturally and as previously described, according to socioeconomic opportunity and food availability. The cultural influences on the diets of children and young people are important.. Food advertising which targets children and young people is widespread. This takes various forms including television, sports branding and more recently web site advertising, (Food commission, 2005). A recent research review concluded that the advertised diet is less healthy than the recommended one. While peer pressure and TV commercials for junk food can make getting kids to eat well seem impossible, there are steps parents can take to instill healthy eating habits without turning mealtimes into a battle zone. By encouraging healthy eating habits now, you can

make a huge impact on your children's lifelong relationship with food and give them the best opportunity to grow into healthy, confident adults.

Children develop a natural preference for the foods they enjoy the most, so the challenge is to make healthy choices appealing. Of course, no matter how good your intentions, it's always going to be difficult to convince your eight-year-old that an apple is as sweet a treat as a cookie. However, you *can* ensure that your children's diet is as nutritious and wholesome as possible, even while allowing for some of their favorite treats. The childhood impulse to imitate is strong, so it's important you act as a role model for your kids. It's no good asking your child to eat fruit and vegetables while you gorge on potato chips and soda.

Need for Nutrition

Nutrition plays a key role in healthy child development. Well-nourished children are more likely to get the energy and essential nutrients they need to grow, be active, stay healthy and do well at school. Healthy eating habits formed in childhood will help children to grow into healthy adults. Unfortunately, today, too many children have unhealthy eating patterns which affect their well-being now and for the future. Nutrition surveys show that children are: Filling up on foods and beverages with poor nutritional value, such as soft drinks and French fries Eating too many calories from high-fat, unhealthy fat, salty and/or sugary foods not meeting the minimum number of recommended servings of the basic four food groups, especially for Vegetables and Fruit and Milk and Alternatives. Skipping breakfast, especially as they get older Poor nutrition keeps children from doing well at school. They may be more likely to become sick and miss classes have more behavioural and emotional problems be less able to concentrate, solve problems and remember information Have lower test scores and be more irritable

Nutritional needs of toddlers and young children

An important part of a toddler's diet is calcium (they need about 500 mg/day), and the best source of this nutrient is milk. Until the age of two they should drink whole milk, but older toddlers can usually switch to 2% or skim milk if approved by your pediatrician. If your kids are lactose intolerant or don't like dairy, incorporate calcium-rich foods like fortified soy products, cereals, and orange juice.

Toddlers need 7mg a day to prevent iron deficiency, which can affect growth, learning, and behavior. In infancy, breast-milk has a readily-absorbed type of iron, and baby formula and food is usually iron-fortified, so babies don't need to worry about getting enough iron. After switching to "real" food, it's important to ensure

that your child is eating good sources of iron like fortified cereals, small amounts of red meat (like soft meatballs), or eggs.

The school-age period is the latent time of growth of children. The rate of growth slows and the body changes occur gradually. Girl usually out distance boys by the latter part of this period. The slowed rate of growth during this period result in a gradual decline in the food requirement per unit of body weight. The energy requirements of the body are:

	7-9 years	10-15 years
BOYS	1950 K Cal	2190 K Cal
GIRLS	1950 K Cal	1970 K cal

Nutritional requirements

Nutritive requirements of boys and girls are more or less the same till the first 9 years. After that there is variation in some nutrients.

Calories and proteins

Body requirements of calories are increased steadily for this age group. Requirements remain almost same for the girls from the age of 7 to 12 years. But for boys, the requirement increases from the age of 7 - 9 to 10 - 12 years. This is because the reserves are being laid down for the demands of the approaching adolescent period. The increased requirements of protein (54 g) would meet demands of growth. Girls require more protein (57 g) between 10 -12 than boys, for approaching menarche.

Minerals

Ten to twelve year old children require more calcium than adults to meet skeletal growth demands. As the blood volume also increases, iron requirement also increases.

Vitamins

Vitamin A and C are required in the same quantity as adults. Vitamin B requirements are in proportion to the calorie requirement.

Nutrition guidelines

As children develop, they require the same healthy foods adults eat, along with more vitamins and minerals to support growing bodies. This means whole grains (whole wheat, oats, barley, rice, millet, quinoa); a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables; calcium for growing bones (milk, yogurt, or substitutes if lactose intolerant); and healthy proteins (fish, eggs, poultry, lean meat, nuts, and seeds).

Healthy fats are also important:

- **Monounsaturated fats**, from plant oils like canola oil, peanut oil, and olive oil, as well as avocados, nuts (like almonds, hazelnuts, and pecans), and seeds (such as pumpkin, sesame).
- **Polyunsaturated fats**, including Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids, found in fatty fish, such as salmon, herring, mackerel, anchovies, and sardines, or in unheated sunflower, corn, soybean, and flaxseed oils, and walnuts.

Dietary guidelines for toddlers and young children

Fruits and vegetables	Two servings each per day. These may be given as snacks, such as apple or carrot slices. Also try adding veggies to soups.
Whole grains	Four daily servings. Can include buckwheat pancakes or multigrain toast for breakfast, a sandwich on wheat bread for lunch and brown rice or another whole grain as part of the evening meal.
Milk and dairy	Three servings, or one pint of whole milk per day. Cheeses, yogurt, and milk puddings are useful alternatives.
Protein	Two servings a day. Encourage your child to try a variety of proteins, such as turkey, eggs, fish, chicken, lamb, baked beans, and lentils.
Vitamins and minerals	Check with your child's doctor to be certain their diet is adequately meeting the recommended nutritional needs for this age group

Top tips to promote healthy childhood eating

- **Have regular family meals.** Knowing dinner is served at approximately the same time every night and that the entire family will be sitting down together is comforting and enhances appetite. Breakfast is another great time for a family meal, especially since kids who eat breakfast tend to do better in school.
- **Cook more meals at home.** Eating home cooked meals is healthier for the whole family and sets a great example for kids about the importance of food. Restaurant meals tend to have more fat, sugar, and salt. Save dining out for special occasions.

- **Get kids involved.** Children enjoy helping adults to shop for groceries, selecting what goes in their lunch box, and preparing dinner. It's also a chance for you to teach them about the nutritional values of different foods, and (for older children) how to read food labels.
- **Make a variety of healthy snacks available instead of empty calorie snacks.** Keep plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grain snacks, and healthy beverages (water, milk, pure fruit juice) around and easily accessible so kids become used to reaching for healthy snacks instead of empty calorie snacks like soda, chips, or cookies.
- **Limit portion sizes.** Don't insist your child cleans the plate, and never use food as a reward or bribe.

Conclusion

Recent evidence of the increasing levels of overweight, obese and diabetic children and young people in the world around has led to a focus on the food and lifestyle behaviours of this population group. It is already widely established that the risks of these particular conditions and diseases are significantly reduced by a combination of eating a balanced diet and being physically active. Long term effects of poor diet and lack of exercise are clearly linked to an increased risk of other diseases such as coronary heart disease and cancer. Statistics related to obesity in children have established a close relation between unhealthy eating habits and the increase in extra body fat. In fact, poor eating habits are cited to be one of the major causes of childhood obesity. With fast foods as an integral and unavoidable part of dietary habits, it's not surprising to observe a significant rise in the number of children suffering from issues related to their weight. Who should be blamed for the health crisis assuming an endemic proportion in kids all across the world First and foremost, it is sad to note that some parents are careless or rather they have no time for their kids to provide them cooked meals and educate them on healthy eating.

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